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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003442

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SUNNI NEGOTIATORS STICK TO CALL FOR DELAY ON
FEDERALISM UNTIL NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) Summary: At an August 20 meeting with PolCouns, two members of the Sunni constitution negotiating team argued for a delay in a decision on Federalism until a National Assembly can be elected under the new constitution. Stressing that Sunnis want to participate in upcoming elections, they complained that the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) has yet to open all promised voter registration centers (VRCs). The Sunni representatives also complained of Sunni parties' lack of resources. While Sunni Arabs will vote in national elections, these two local political figures weren't sure whom the national Sunni Arab leadership would turn out to be. They discounted Allawi but said that former Sunni religious endowment leader Adnan Dulaimi has some appeal. Our overall sense is that despite the real security problems in Sunni Arab areas, we will see more Sunni voters in the next elections than we saw in the January 2005 election. It is far less clear whether they will vote for the draft constitution in October or who would gain their votes in the December 2005 election that is now only four months away. End Summary.

12. (C/NF) Constitutional Committee member Dr. Hassib Arif al-Obaidi (from Kirkuk) and Sheikh Anwar an Nada al-Lahibi of the United Iraqi Council (from Mosul) told PolCouns that the current Iraqi political situation is too fragile to permit establishment of new regional entities inside a federal Iraq. The Sunni representatives urged that the issue be kept out of the new constitution and left for discussion by the next National Assembly. Obaidi insisted that he would support a decentralized government as well as Kurdish autonomy, but asked "how can we expect people to make serious decisions in the face of such constant threats?" Both men argued that in the face of popular frustrations attached to both security and infrastructure problems now, it is impossible to have rational political debates about the future structure of a federal system in Iraq.

13. (C/NF) Lahibi and Obaidi said that Sunnis want to participate in upcoming national elections; they predicted a strong turnout. However, Anwar urged that the IECI open more of the promised voter registration centers in Sunni areas. He claimed that in Al Anbar Province, only 9 of the initially proposed 28 VRCs are currently open. Dr. Obaidi requested Embassy help arranging a meeting between IECI and Sunni leaders to discuss plans to decrease fraud and increase transparency during upcoming elections. (NOTE: Our understanding is that the IECI has opened more voter registration centers in Anbar. There is a need for more Sunni Arab political leaders talking to the election commission, and we scheduled such a meeting for August 23.)

14. (C/NF) Obaidi expressed concern over the lack of Sunni party resources to fully participate in elections. They warned that no Sunni political entity would be able to reach Sunni voters throughout the country. PolCouns urged that these two interlocutors think about how to join with other Sunni Arab political forces to form a stronger coalition. He reminded them of the success of the Shia List 169. PolOffs suggested that any party that rejected violence could approach IRI and NDI for support. They took the point and noted that Ayed Allawi is trying to build such a coalition. Obaidi, however, warned that Allawi would have his own problems in Sunni areas; people would remember that Allawi ordered the attacks in the Fall of 2004 against Samarra and Fallujah. By contrast, they thought the nascent "Sunni People's Conference" that held a well-attended meeting in Baghdad in May under the sponsorship of the Sunni Waqf might provide an umbrella under which Sunni Arab political leaders could gather. Obaidi and Lahibi highlighted that former Sunni Waqf leader Adnan Dulaimi would be an effective spokesman in the eyes of many Sunni Arabs.

15. (C/NF) Comment: Obaidi and Anwar's plea for a delay in a decision on Federalism and more resources for Sunni parties tracks closely with conversations we held August 21 and 22 with other Sunni Arab negotiators. These points are often joined by arguments for sharing Iraqi resources at the national level and of the looming threat of Iranian domination of Iraq. Their remarks about Sunni Arabs coming

out to vote also tracks with what we hear from other contacts. However, none of our interlocutors so far will hazard whether or not they will vote for the draft constitution and few will venture a guess about who will draw the most votes from Sunni Arab voters in December. End Comment.

Khalilzad